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RR RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR  
DE RUEHLG #0204 0601629  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 011629Z MAR 06  
FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2440  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS LILONGWE 000204

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STATE FOR AF/S GABRIELLE MALLORY  
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEDC](#) [MI](#)

SUBJ: MALAWIAN MUSLIMS PROTEST CARTOONS

1.(U) Muslims in both Lilongwe and Blantyre held rallies on February 24 against the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in European newspapers. A few of the approximately 300 protestors in Lilongwe began throwing rocks at police after they were refused permits for the march at the last minute. Police responded by firing tear gas at the protestors, making nine arrests in all. One 16-year old boy was injured, after a protester's rock hit him in the head. Aside from this incident there were no other injuries.

2.(SBU) Comment: The protest was ostensibly focused on the Danish cartoons. But in the Malawi context, it also was (rare) chance for Muslims to go to the streets with a grievance in hand. The subtext was the discrimination the community perceives and voices on the part of President Mutharika's government. It also was loosely associated with Vice President Cassim Chilumpha, who is Muslim, and the attempt by Mutharika to remove him from office which began two weeks ago. In the end the protest was relatively non-violent and well-handled by the police.

3.(SBU) The protest was supported by the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM), one of two major Muslim groups in Malawi. While MAM has generally opposed Mutharika's government, the less popular Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi publicly works with the government. Though none of the cartoons were published in the Malawian media, the issue gave MAM a convenient excuse to take to the streets to express their displeasure at a series of perceived slights by the GOM. In recent months, MAM leaders have complained that Muslim communities have not received adequate humanitarian food aid distributions during Malawi's food crisis. MAM also requested a meeting with the President last month to discuss the widening political gap between government and the Muslim community, but to date Mutharika has not agreed to see them. No further demonstrations linked to the cartoons are expected.

EASTHAM